The "Ammunition Shortage" and the New Stab-in-the-Back Myth, See Page 2

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That Wild Uproar May Herald Peace

Washington this past week has been the center of a tempest. But the howling gales, the deafening tumult and the tension have been good signs, not bad. It is the approach of peace which has aroused to furious protest every pro-war element in the Western coalition from Seoul to Bonn, and within both parties at home. The balance of forces making for peace is precarious. Some new provocation may easily upset it, and plunge us suddenly into wider conflict abroad and intensified repression at home. The screaming will grow louder, the danger greater, as peace draws nearer, but the direction of events is hopeful and President Eisenhower himself is a positive factor in this situation, a factor on the side of peace and world sanity.

This becomes clearer if one looks carefully and as objectively as possible at the Taft speech in Cincinnati and the President's reactions to it. Taft is not a demagogue. He is an able and well-informed conservative. The speech was painfully honest in its survey of American foreign policy and its search for a way out. After six years of cold war cant, it is refreshing to hear Taft say again as he did in the original Senate debate on the Atlantic Pact, that the Truman doctrine and NATO could not easily be reconciled with the United Nations Charter, that we had abandoned the UN for a system of military alliances. Though Taft's is the voice of Midwestern isolationism, there were passages in the speech which will be read gratefully in Western Europe. "It is pretty hard," Taft said of our restrictions on East-West trade, "for the United States to claim the right to cut off trade channels which have existed for centuries." He urged that we try to understand the problems of other countries "and not force upon them a policy they do not approve, either by the pressure of grants of money or grants of soldiers." No one of any importance in Washington has spoken that way in a long time.

But the context of the speech is bad, and its confusions are endless. The same man who objects to any undertaking to defend Norway and Denmark against Russia would have us persevere in holding out the hope of American "liberation" for Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Rumania. This certainly is not cutting the cloth of national policy to the fit of military realities. Taft says that he has felt from the beginning that "we should have insisted on a general peace negotiation with China, including a unification of Korea under free Koreans, and a pledge against further expansion in Southeast Asia." But such an over-all settlement would require the recognition of Communist China and the liquidation of the Chiang Kai-shek regime. There is no indication whatsoever that Taft is prepared to support such a settlement. Indeed the context of his demand that we "go it alone" if truce talks break down in Korea is resentment against the much smaller concessions forced from American policy by British, French and Indian pressure.

Taft's honesty leads him to hopelessness but this hopelessness may swiftly turn to desperation. This is why the Taft speech has been welcomed in those circles which are fighting peace. This is why it is hailed by Father Curran and David Lawrence. Taft sees the disintegration of the Western alliance. He is doubtful that we can go on buying firm allies. He thinks we may have to "go it alone" but he doesn't say where. He says he has "always felt that we should not attempt to fight Russia on the ground on the Continent of Europe any more than we should attempt to fight China on the Continent of Asia." But to raise the cry "go it alone" at this moment is to suggest throwing off the restraints imposed by our allies and embarking on a course which must lead to war with China and may lead to war with Russia. And every sober military man agrees that such wars must ultimately be fought out on the ground, which in this case means thousands of miles from home and against an enormous superiority of manpower. It is this huge and terrifying blind spot which makes the isolationism of Taft the avenue to a wider adventurism. It is this which makes the sober and decent Cincinnati corporation lawyer the leader of those forces in the Republican party on which the China Lobby sets its hopes. It is this which makes him the bedfellow of Bridges and McCarthy.

It is a mistake to believe that the breakup of the Western coalition is necessarily a factor for peace. If it breaks up just when Churchill and our Western allies are beginning to restrain American policy and to move toward negotiation, then the result may be calamitous. In this perspective, Eisenhower's comment on the Taft speech reflects not only an understanding of the need for compromise in any coalition policy but a willingness to compromise. And compromise in this situation means compromise for peace. This is why Adenauer and Rhee both are appealing frantically to Washington against further talks. This is why the China Lobby is pushing hard for Congressional action to take the U.S. out of the UN and to shut off American appropriations for the UN if there is a vote to seat Communist China. This is why the split grows inside the Republican party and the Eisenhower Administration itself. This is why McCarthy is driving hard for bad relations with Britain.

The coalition which was acceptable when it meant air bases for attack on Russia begins to seem an urgent menace when it becomes a force to draw an unwilling America toward peace talks. Eisenhower's leadership may be weak, but its direction is good. He is the center around which rally those elements in the business community which want a more moderate policy and negotiations. Moscow and Peking may make fateful errors if they fail to see the real balance of forces here, and if the Chinese Communists let stubborn considerations of pride and prestige stand in the way of making a settlement in Korea now.

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That "Ammunition Shortage" and a New Stab-in-the-Back Myth

The German military after World War I came up with the myth of a "stab in the back" on the home front to explain away their defeat in the field. A comparable myth is being fabricated by some of our military and exploited by Republicans and right wing Democrats to alibi the failure to win a decisive victory in Korea over much more poorly equipped enemy forces.

Hitler utilized the "stab in the back" myth to gain popular support. The myth implied that the Social Democrats were traitors to the Fatherland. It also spread the notion that German military power, if free from treachery at home, could dominate the world. A similar myth may play a similar role in this country.

The newly developing "stab in the back" theory of the Korean war falls into two related parts: (1) victory was in our grasp when the Truman Administration agreed to a truce; (2) the truce and the failure to win the Korean war were the result of an ammunition shortage. In both cases the charge of Democratic error on the home front passes over easily into the imputation of Democratic treason. Such ideas may help pave the way to Fascism at home and war abroad.

The New Senate Report

These ideas have been advanced by General Van Fleet since his return from Korea and given a sounding board in *Life* Magazine and a series of Congressional hearings. This is the context in which one must read the new "ammunition shortage" report turned in by a Senate Armed Services subcommittee early last week. The report made sensational headlines at the expense of anxiety in thousands of American homes. The charge that an ammunition shortage had caused "a needless loss of American lives" conjured up a picture of American boys killed because they had run out of ammunition.

But neither in the extended hearings nor in the report itself was there any evidence that a single American boy was killed because he lacked ammunition. The one dissenting Senator on the subcommittee, Kefauver, Democrat, of Tennessee, protested that "the statement is based, as the committee acknowledges, on conflicting testimony between various army generals."

The fact is that on the one crucial point there was no conflict. The Generals agreed that there was no shortage at the front itself. The report says U.S. Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins "stated that the man at the front was never out of ammunition." The report admits, "In a sense General Van Fleet agreed with General Collins' statement. He stated that the man at the gun always had in his possession what is known as a basic load. This is the amount of ammunition which can be carried with the weapon to its position."

No one would guess from the report that testimony showed our forces were firing ten times as much ammunition as the enemy and that authorized rates of fire were far higher than in the last war.

A Matter of Definition

At these levels of consumption, shortages did develop in certain items at supply points behind the lines. Here part of the dispute between Van Fleet and Collins was a matter of definition. According to the report itself, Army officials regarded a 60-day ammunition supply as the safety level. On the other hand, the report says, "General Van Fleet describes a critical short supply as existing when the ammunition on hand and in reserve is less than a 65-day supply."

These are technical matters which must be left to military men. The only point made here is that it was wrong to make a report implying that American lives were lost because American soldiers ran out of ammunition when in fact the subcommittee had no such evidence.

A careful examination of the report and the testimony shows that Van Fleet in alleging shortages was talking (1) of certain specific items: mortar and howitzer shells of specified calibres and hand grenades and (2) of shortages behind the lines. Even so his testimony is full of discrepancies. At one point he said that ammunition was in short supply "during the entire 22 months" he was in Korea. But a little later he denied that a shortage of ammunition explained the refusal to allow him to continue that supposed victory offensive in June 1951:

Senator BYRD. Was the ammunition an adverse factor at the time?

General VAN FLEET. No, sir; we had enough ammunition then.

On the other hand the Armed Services subcommittee report says, "There is evidence to indicate that a part of the decision in the summer of 1951, to conduct a sitdown war in Korea, was influenced by the fact that our military planners knew our ammunition supplies were in such bad shape and instituted this new policy to conserve ammunition." If there is such evidence, it was not produced either in the report or the lengthy hearings which preceded it. The testimony of General Collins, as we shall see, showed on the contrary that offensive plans were vetoed not to save ammunition but to conserve lives.

Van Fleet's Contradictions

Van Fleet's testimony that the truce talks deprived him of victories is worth careful examination. He never told the same story twice. On March 4 before the House Armed Services Committee, he was asked about an interview he had given in Korea saying that the war might have been ended with victory in 1951 had it not been for the truce talks.

"In other words," Congressman Arends asked him, "had we followed up at that particular moment in place of going into these interminable talks, why, we might have brought about the successful conclusion of that war, in your opinion?"

"I would like to think so," was Van Fleet's answer, "as being the man on the spot at the time."

"A Little Overstated"

But the very next day in executive session before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Van Fleet answered the same question differently. Here is the colloquy as it appears on page 31 of the printed record:

Senator BYRD. You were quoted, I think, General, in the newspapers, as I recall it, as saying on two occasions that you could have gotten the military victory in Korea, is that correct?

General VAN FLEET: I think that was a little overstated in the paper, or we might define what you mean by a military victory.

I would not say a complete victory, but in June of 1951 we had the Communist armies on the run; they were hurting badly, out of supplies, completely out of hand or control; they were in a panic. . . .

Still another version was given by Van Fleet when he was questioned again by the Senate committee, this time on April 1. Senator Byrd recalled that in his previous testimony he had said that "you had the Communist armies on the run and felt convinced then that you could win a military victory but that you were stopped by orders not to pursue and finish the enemy." It then appeared for the first time that it was not a case of simple pursuit.

"Early in June," Van Fleet replied, "I recommended to General Ridgway, who was then the Far Eastern commander, that we follow that up with an amphibious landing on the east coast . . . and that operation was stopped."

On this day of testimony Van Fleet did not claim that this operation would have led to a final military victory. The best claim which now appeared in the Van Fleet-Byrd colloquy is that we "could have captured a great many of the enemy and destroyed their supplies."

Collins Saw No Panic

Quite a different picture was presented by General Collins when he was before the same subcommittee on April 20. He flatly denied Van Fleet's testimony that the enemy was fleeing in panic.

"I assure you, Senator," General Collins said to Byrd, "that I was over there shortly after that time, and neither I nor anybody else that I know saw any signs of panic. We were getting pretty severe casualties at that time."

As for the "victory offensive" which was countermanded in June, 1951, General Collins put two official documents

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COMMENT

The Rosenberg Case

The Supreme Court last week for the third time refused to grant a hearing in the Rosenberg case but on this occasion Mr. Justice Douglas joined Mr. Justice Black in favor of a review. A new execution date has now been set for June 15.

There is no doubt that the death sentence is shockingly out of line with the offense. The case for clemency is strengthened by the appearance of new evidence and new expert affidavits which call for examination in a court of law. A decent respect for the opinion of mankind calls for clemency and a new trial.

The case for a new trial is, if anything, strengthened by the peculiar circumstances under which the physicist William Perl was finally brought to trial and convicted of perjury in denying that he knew Julius Rosenberg and Morton Sobell.

The indictment of Perl came in the midst of the Rosenberg trial, creating another sensation unfavorable to the defendants. The chief prosecuting attorney said Perl was to be a corroborating witness for the State but he was neither produced nor brought to trial. The government now says that it is in a position to link Perl "directly" to the Rosenberg "espionage ring." If it has, it should join the defense in application for a new trial and accept the challenge of erasing doubt about the Rosenberg verdict.

On Arming the Germans

Some indication of the growing strength of the Germans—and of the thinking of General Alfred M. Gruenther, newly appointed to succeed Ridgway as the head of NATO—may be seen in this unnoticed passage of his testimony recently before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

General Gruenther was discussing the treaty for a European Defense Community. "We no longer have the alternative of not arming the Germans," Gruenther told the committee, "the question is: What is the best way for the Germans to participate? Too much water has gone over the dam now to be able to assume that it is realistic to keep the Germans under an occupation status much longer. The future of Europe depends in large measure on the solution of the German problem.

"As I see the problem," Gruenther went on, "it is not the alternatives of arm or not arm. *It is a question of making the best of a risky situation, evaluating whether there is more to fear from the Russian or from the German.*" (Italics added.)

I have had to postpone my promised piece on why Churchill shifted his position. But when a top American General can say that there may now be doubt as to "whether there is more to fear from the Russian or from the German," it should not seem strange that British and French opinion as a whole no longer share our exclusive American preoccupation with the old Red menace.

The Right Answer

We cannot resist passing on this anecdote from Walter Trohan's "Washington Scrapbook" in the *Chicago Tribune*. Mr. Trohan attributes it to Louis J. Russell, chief investigator for the House Committee on Un-American Activities. It seems that a young woman applied for a clerical job with the committee some years ago and after satisfying her interrogator about her fitness for the job, she was asked:

"Do you believe in communism?"

"Of course not," was the reply.

"Do you believe in fascism?"

"Oh, yes," said the applicant eagerly.

"Do you know what fascism is?" asked the astounded questioner.

"I haven't the slightest idea," was the answer, "but I read in some newspaper that this was a fascist committee and I'd certainly like to get the job."

Democrats as War Party

Eisenhower is dependent on Democratic votes for much of his program, but it is evident that on the central issue of reduction in armament expenditure, especially on aviation, he faces solid Democratic opposition. Symington is the spokesman for the air lobby. W. Averill Harriman made a speech attacking the "relaxationists." Francis Biddle at the ADA convention sounded off in a similar vein about the menace to national security. Even Congressman Chet Holifield had to balance off his speech last Monday attacking the atomic power grab with a salvo aimed at Eisenhower's reductions in arms expenditure. "To pull up short now," Holifield said, "and look for economies when the issue is nothing less than the survival of the free world is to trifle with destiny and to court disaster."

These stale Truman-Acheson era cliches are unworthy of people like Holifield and Biddle. Experience shows armament races lead to war. Tension rises as arms budgets go up, and tension must be maintained to maintain a high level of expenditures. Unless, to paraphrase Holifield, we pull up short soon, it will be too late to stop the slide toward war. These cries of alarm are all out of proportion to the actual cuts made by Eisenhower and Wilson in air force spending anyway.

Just as the desire for economy leads one wing of the Republican party toward peace, the easy spending proclivities of the Democrats make them the natural allies of the greedy aviation lobby and the trigger-happy Air Force bureaucracy.

Best News of the Week

Omitted by the Republican majority leadership in Congress from their list of "must" legislation for this session: the McCarran bill to deprive witnesses before Congressional committees of their privilege under the Fifth amendment in return for a spurious immunity.

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into the record during the executive hearing on April 20. One showed that Ridgway had vetoed, without submission to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a Van Fleet plan for an amphibious landing behind the enemy lines on the East Coast on June 6, combined with a general offensive northeast from the Chorwon-Kumwa area. Among the reasons given by Ridgway were "the continuing capability of the enemy for offensive action" and "the small reward to be gained if the operation is successful."

The other document was a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff from Ridgway on June 26 reporting, "Visited the United States I Corps front today with Van Fleet and Milburn. Nothing significant to report concerning enemy action and capabilities. . . . Van Fleet believes, and I concur, that advance to a general line north of a certain line while tactically and logistically feasible at present would entail unacceptable casualties."

Thus the documents presented by General Collins and his own first hand estimate of the situation in Korea shows that Van Fleet's claim of a decisive victory thwarted by the truce talks was (as Van Fleet admitted) "a little overstated in the paper."

Unfortunately this admission, like the Collins testimony here quoted, was given in executive session. The headlines had already created the false impression, so that we even have the *New Republic* last week saying "It may be, as Van Fleet maintains, that we could have pressed our offensive to a successful conclusion in 1951." The myth goes marching on.

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JENNINGS PERRY'S PAGE

Bill Oatis Free Finds the Way of Fact Is Hard

This week, Americans whose foible is reading their newspaper from back to front probably were first to see the little piece about Bill Oatis going to a sanitarium for treatment of a lung condition. The radio also had a spot on it. Apparently this is the ailment mentioned by Oatis when upon his return he was strenuously pressed to tell just how he was "drugged" by his Czech jailors. Oatis' reply, in which he was firm, that he was given injections for his lung condition but that these had no effect whatever on his mind, was not too well received. It was received no better, indeed, than his refusal to retract his confession or his persistence in reminding his interviewers that he was charged, tried and convicted not under the laws of his own country but under the laws of the country in which he was working as a correspondent of the Associated Press.

The relegation of the Oatis story to the inside pages need surprise none. There is no use blinking the fact that Oatis free has been a great disappointment to many members of our press who tied the whistles of their columns down on the subject of Oatis held in vile duress over there. His ordeal had been told and retold in detail; the build up of his martyrdom was tremendous. He had only to bring in a personal account backing up even roughly the harrowing tale of his vicissitudes already told for him for true—nay, to do no more than to profess not to remember—and the tale would have stood up as already spread and accepted. Instead he turned out, as surely it must seem to those who most angrily wept ink at his plight, a most "uncooperative witness."

He gave his own report of what happened to him in the Czech courts and in the Czech jails, and stuck to it. He denied that he was ever drugged, tortured or brainwashed. He would not say that he had not violated the laws of Czechoslovakia or that he had been ignorant of the law. Asked whether he felt he had violated the ethics of his profession, he repeatedly attempted to make the point that what is considered fair in newsgathering at home is not necessarily permitted in the work of newsgathering in other lands. His personal report had the earmarks of candor. The question remains of whether, in maintaining his own version of what happened to him, Bill Oatis in any way "let down" either his country or his profession—whether, no matter what he experienced, saw or thought, he did not owe it to his country and profession to go along with the story of the enemy's atrocious treatment of Oatis written when Oatis himself could not get in a word?

For my part, I cannot see that this question has any bearing upon, or is borne upon by, the other matter left hanging by all the speculation to date—whether Oatis was or was not an American spy. I remember writing at the time of the arrest and trial that since our country also must be presumed to have spies, and since the work is entirely praiseworthy when done by our side, it would be contemptible to suppose that the patriotism of newspapermen would not be equal to it. I suggested then that the Czechs send Bill Oatis on home to his wife, as an evidence of their understanding of the under-the-rose facts of international life.

Oatis may or may not have been in communication with our intelligence officials in Prague outside the strict line of his professional duties; he has declined to make a statement on that. It stands to reason however, that if he were, his motives were those of a loyal citizen. He would have been "doing his duty as he saw it."

It does not follow that either loyalty or duty required of him, after his release, that he should shape his tale to conform to any and all representations made by our foreign office in connection with his case. Nor that the ethics of his profession require him to affirm, despite whatever he personally might know to the contrary, that the lurid and inflammatory "Oatis story" woven generally by the American press during his captivity was "the way it was."

The first article in the code of a good newspaperman is objectivity—and let the chips fall where they may. I cannot help feeling that throughout Bill Oatis has been a good newspaperman by that light, that he has tried before all to be loyal to Fact, and that the most onerous part of his experience has been the attempt of opinionated colleagues at home to "break down his story," to compel him to agree that the true history of his case is not as he recalls and reports it but as it has been set down and stylized in full cold war prose by those who were not there.

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